

PRODUCT CLOSE-UP

PEARL ET-SERIES 8-Ply Maple Drums



by Bob Saydlowski, Jr.

The Pearl drum company has done it again. They've introduced 8-ply maple shells in addition to their existing lines of fiberglass, phenolic, and the less-expensive 9-ply wood shelled drums.

Pearl's 8-ply maple shells are cross-laminated, finished inside with a clear lacquer, and a single straight interior seam. All of Pearl's maple drums are assembled in the United States, not Japan. The *G-Series* kits are stained, sealed, finished, and buffed to a high-gloss. The *EarthTone (ET) Series* omits the high-buff process at a slightly reduced cost. Pearl has thus made a different pricing structure for the *G* and *ET* maple shells. The standard line of maple drums is the *EarthTone*, covered in plastic or stained; the top line stained shells are in the *G-Series*.

The *ET-Series* kit components are: 14 x 22 bass drum, 8 x 10 and 8 x 12 toms, 12 x 15 and 14 x 16 floor toms, and a 6 1/2 x 14 snare drum.

The 22" bass drum has 20 lugs with "T"-style tensioners, cast claws, and standard metal hoops. Each hoop is cannalled on the inside and inlaid in plastic on the outside, matching the drum's finish. A 3" wide felt strip is also included under the batter head. I'd personally like to see Pearl change the two bottom T-handle rods to square-head drum key operated ones. It would make fine tuning so much easier.

Pearl has updated their bass drum spurs into what could be called the best spurs on the market. The mount plate has been beefed-up, and the telescopic inner leg has been fattened a bit. The inner leg is no longer threaded, but is now smooth and slides up and down in the spur tube, locking with a T-screw. Lengthening the extension of this inner leg gives a greater upward angle to the drum. The spur is still sprung at the plate, but has two notches corresponding to two lips on the main tube; one to set-up at a pre-set forward angle, the other to fold the spur flush to the shell for packing. A large T-screw against a hard plastic disc locks the spur's angle. Once the notch is locked in, all forward "skating" of the drum is arrested. The tips of the spurs have threaded rubber feet with a counterlock washer. The rubber feet can be adjusted up to expose a spike

point similar to Sonor's spur tip concept. The bass drum has no mounted tom holder base plate. All toms are floor-stand mounted, a sensible idea. All additional hardware on a bass drum does cut down on its natural resonance and tone. The drum was fitted with a Remo *PinStripe* batter, and a special *Black Beat* front head made by Pearl in Japan. The 22" *Black Beat* is available as an option or can be had separately at \$36.50.

The bass drum had good depth and response for its size, with good tonal resonance. Some padding behind the batter head flattened out the sound a little, giving extra punch, but still allowed a definite pitch to come through.

This particular kit is unique in that it does not use conventional floor toms on legs. The basic idea is to resonate the floor toms a little more without having vibrations transmitted through brackets and legs directly to the floor.

The 10" and 12" toms have 12 lugs each; the 12 x 15 and 14 x 16 have 16 lugs each. All have triple-flanged hoops, and only two have internal dampers (15" and 16").

A silver Pearl logo is screened on a black background, each badge now stamped with a serial number. Above the venthole on each drum is a tacked label proclaiming, "Maple Shell".

All the toms are fitted with *Vari-Set* receiver brackets with strengthening plates inside. *Vari-Set* tom brackets are pretty much square with a raised receiver hole, split in half with a half-section indirect clamp—sprung and drum key-operated on one side, a T-screw on the other. When the tom arm passes through the receiver, the screw is tightened, stopping all twisting and turning of the drum. This positive angle is aided by a cast, drum key-operated *Vari-Set* lock ring on the arm which locates into a female slot on the bracket. The tom-tom arms are tubular steel with cast circular boss joints (which now have a sandblast finish), with square-head adjust screws at their top. The arms measure 200mm long, 355mm arms are also available. The angle adjustment is similar to Pearl's cymbal tilter concept—no ratchet teeth, but a smoothed inner "drum" that allows *any* angle a player could want. Pearl also offers a less-expensive version

catalogued as the 727 which has a ratchet angle adjust. The bottom of each arm is again fitted with a *Vari-Set* lock memory ring, which locates into a slot on the AX-3 adaptor mounted on the tom floor stand. The AX-3 resembles a modified "T" having three holes all split in half with indirect clamps. This time both sides of the clamp are drum key-operated, one side being sprung. One hole fits the 989 stand tube (which *also* has a *Vari-Set* lock); the other two holes are reserved for the tom-tom arms. More AX-3's may be added onto the stand, or even onto the tom arms for additional drum mounts or cymbal holders, saving greatly on space. Custom modular set-ups can be built.

The entire *Vari-Set* holder operates extremely well. There is *no* movement *anywhere* once the memory locks are fitted in and everything is tightened up. It truly is an amazing system.

The 989 tom floor stands have double-braced tripod legs and one adjustable height tier. They provide for close positioning of the drums and are extremely stable. The top tube is cut straight and capped for AX-3 mounting with a *Vari-Set* lock at its height joint. All the stands have indirect half-section clamping at the joints, including this 989. All the drums fitted easily on their stands except for the 16", which fit really tight due to what seems to have been an inaccurately installed bracket.

All the toms were fitted with Remo *PinStripe* batters and clear *Ambassador* bottoms. The toms sounded crisp and clear at all tunings. They're not as loud as fiberglass, but could hold their own in an amplified setting. And it was possible to get a balance of sound between the mounted toms and floor toms. Experimenting with Evans hydraulics, the drums had a more subdued, rounder sound. They were not as muffled, as other wooden drums I've tried set-up with hydraulic heads.

I was fortunate to be able to test Pearl's new *ET314DC* maple snare drum with the brand new strainer. This 6 1/2" drum has 10 double-ended lugs and die-cast hoops, along with *two* opposite ventholes. But the big feature of this drum is the new *S-017* strainer which is replacing the *Jupiter*. It's a parallel-ac-

tion/super-sensitive type with adjustments on both ends of the drum for even snare tension. The drum has a steel rod passing through, connecting with the strainer assembly to aid in even snare drop, as well as to reinforce the shell. The snare wires are connected by screws in 10-strand pairs to a bar on either side of the mechanism, allowing them to extend past the head. The bars are joined by two parallel steel rods. Horizontal and vertical tension is done by knobs at the sides, and at the throw-off and butt casings, respectively. Both casings are fat cast blocks, which remind me of the Hinger *Touch-Tone* strainer casings, with nylon block inserts. The throw-off operates in a side-to-side lever action, dropping both ends evenly down their casing blocks. And it's *so* quiet. The throw-off lever works very smoothly. This strainer is a bit less complicated than others I've seen of this type. The only real problem is in having to replace the snare wires if the need arises. It could be quite an operation as the mounting screws are somewhat hidden by the assembly. You'd probably have to disassemble the entire set-up to get at the screws.

The snare was fitted with a *Pinstripe* batter and *Ambassador* bottom. From my experience with die-cast hoops, most drums have a sort of "boxy" sound, yet this drum was crisp and alive. Response was good all around the head. One complaint is with the internal muffler. This one was binding up tight against the shell, and very difficult to adjust. They really should go towards external dampers. This drum, at \$268 list, boosts the kit's retail to \$2,008. However, Pearl does have seven other less expensive snare models available.

Pearl's 900 Series stands are included with the *ET* kit. All joints are sandblast finished and utilize the cast half-section joint clamp.

The 900 hi-hat has a hinged-heel sandblasted footboard linked by a fat nylon piece to enclosed double parallel springs. The hi-hat operates on a double-pull system, and spring tension is adjusted conveniently at the top of each external spring chamber. It has a single-braced tripod base, fitted with a *Vari-Set* lock on the height tube. The top rod is longer than most, and the clutch itself is threaded only on the top and bottom, leaving smooth metal where the cymbal would be. I'd like it better with a nylon coating. Pearl has engineered a unique spur system on the 900. Each leg has a rotating tip connected to it, one end with rubber, one with a spike point. The entire tip is held with a square screw which may be loosened, allowing the tip to be changed from rubber to spike, or vice versa. Even with the rubber tip down, the hi-hat

wouldn't slide—it remained stable. The 900's action is a lot better than the 800 model. Soft or hard tension is achieved with a minimum of turns.

Pearl's 906 snare stand is basically the same as the 806, with a basket clamped with a threaded tightening nut, a single tripod base, and swivel wing bolt angle and adjustment. The rubber grips on the basket arms of the 906 have been fattened up and hardened. Instead of the wing bolt/nylon bushing joint, it has the *Vari-Set* joint clamp, but without the *Vari-Set* lock. The 906 works easily and holds the drum well, at only \$5.00 more than its 806 brother. For those of you with a deep snare drum, Pearl makes the shorter 906D stand to accommodate deeper depths at a comfortable height.

Two 903 cymbal stands are included with this kit. They have single tripod bases, and extend to a maximum height of 62". The Pearl tilters operate on a rotating "drum" principle. Any angle is obtainable in a 175° radius. The tilter stem has been elongated to allow extreme vertical cymbal angles. All 900 Series stands will take AX-3 adaptors, allowing one to add cymbals or drums without wasting space on stand tripods. It was difficult to get the 903 near the high toms close enough, but an alternative could be to either use a boom cymbal stand, or an AX-3 adaptor on the tom stand with Pearl's mini-boom cymbal holder. Pearl has done away with felt and metal washers and rubber sleeves on the tilter, replacing it all with a two-piece cymbal stabilizer made of hard nylon. The base piece is disc-shaped with a molded-in sleeve. Added on top is a nylon donut which fits tight with the sleeve. Keep in mind, you should *never* squeeze this top piece right down to the cymbal. If you do, you'll soon find out why you're cracking cymbals.

The 810S pedal is currently the top of the line and uses a single expansion spring stretched upwards on the right side of the frame. Tension is adjusted by a wing nut at the top—very convenient when playing. The hinged-heel footboard is sandblasted and has an adjustable/removable toe stop. It is linked to the beater by a nylon strap sandwiched by two pieces of leather. The strap is easily replaceable. Stroke is adjusted by two drum key-operated screws which rotate the axle and spring together. Two sprung spurs are at the frame base. The clamping system uses a steel plate which is raised and lowered by a T-handle screw protruding from the bottom right of the frame. I like this system because it's quick and easy to get to. The overall action of the 810S is clean and natural, even at very loose tension, and it's pretty quick.

The kit I reviewed was finished in jet

black covering. Pearl offers 14 other colors in plastic covering, and three lacquer finishes—blond maple, rosewood, and walnut. The *G-Series* drums are not available with covering, but with lacquer finishes buffed to a gloss. All the finishes are very professional looking, though I did notice the plastic does not go right up to the edges of the shell which could look poorly when the bottom heads are left off. The Japanese catalog has a great deal of finishes not available in the USA, but hopefully, Pearl will import some of them, as a few are real classy.

One more comment. Some of the shells seem to have the same mysterious problem. There are liny holes broken through the plys at the bearing edge where a lack or something might have been. Perhaps Pearl can come up with an answer.

All in all, the drums are beautiful-looking and the hardware is just what the doctor ordered.

Pearl has released a brand new U.S. catalog including: some new 'power tom' sizes (increasing standard depth by 2"), an 8x14 maple snare drum, *BlackBeat* bailer heads, a Pearl line of cymbals, and a total of 19 drum kit configurations. 🥁

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